

VZCZCXYZ0000
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHPG #1649/01 3291755
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 251755Z NOV 05
FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6626
INFO RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS PRAGUE 001649

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EZ](#)

SUBJECT: CZECH CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS: STRUGGLE FOR SOUL OF
THE PARTY COULD HAVE LONG TERM CONSEQUENCES

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. The Christian Democrats (KDU-CSL) in the Czech Republic, a numerically small force, have traditionally exercised an influence beyond their numbers, staking out the middle ground in order to maintain the option of forming coalition governments with larger parties either to their left or right. After the 2002 election, the party teamed up with the Social Democrats (CSSD) and one other small liberal party to form the current ruling coalition. But the party's current Chairman, Miroslav Kalousek, elected two years ago and reelected to a four-year term this month, has increasingly broken ranks with the Social Democrats (CSSD) and adopted several conservative positions that have pulled the party to the right. This is likely to set the stage for a right of-center alliance with the Civic Democrats (ODS), should they be the winners in next summer's election. If the Christian Democrats link themselves too strongly to the Civic Democrats and this right-of-center partnership fails to form a government, it will most likely mean the end of Kalousek's leadership, and possibly even the eventual end of the party in parliament. END SUMMARY.

TIGHTENING THE TIES TO ODS

¶2. (SBU) President Vaclav Klaus, who is honorary Chairman and co-founder of ODS, this month attended the KDU-CSL annual party congress, the first time a sitting president has done so. KDU-CSL -- whose leader brought down former PM Gross earlier this year, and a party with a reputation as an untrustworthy political ally -- was praised by Klaus as a force for stability. Klaus pointed out, much to the party's credit, that its three ministers in the current government are among the longest serving: of the 17 members of the cabinet created in the summer of 2002, only six are still in office, three of whom are from KDU-CSL: Foreign Minister Svoboda, Environment Minister Ambrozek, and Transport Minister Simonovsky. One reason some observers say Klaus is trying to help another political party is the fact that Czech presidents are chosen by parliament. Klaus, who would very much like to be reelected for a second presidential term in 2008, knows that the parliament that is elected next summer will choose the next president in 2008. Just as KDU-CSL might need ODS to stay in parliament, President Klaus might need KDU-CSL to stay on as president.

¶3. (U) The first speaker at the KDU-CSL Congress this month was current ODS Chair, Mirek Topolanek. Topolanek stood before a large banner proclaiming, "Socialni Jistoty Bez Socialmu" (Social stability, without socialism), and took KDU-CSL to task for providing the political cover CSSD needed to increase their cooperation with the Communists. But Topolanek went on to say that he would welcome KDU-CSL as partners in a government that would keep the Communists from reasserting their influence. Kalousek is also scheduled to

speak at the ODS annual party congress this weekend. No speakers have been invited from any other Czech political parties.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND ATTITUDINAL TRENDS AGAINST KDU-CSL

¶4. (U) A significant number of KDU-CSL members are uncomfortable with the positions that Kalousek has taken, his confrontational style, and the result these have had on the party. Deputy Chairman Jan Kasal argued at the congress that the party should maintain its religious roots, but could show a bit more tolerance and flexibility. He argued, for example, that abortion should be allowed when the health of the mother is threatened. Church attendance and belief in God among Czechs have declined steadily over the last decade. A recent EU poll shows only 19% of Czechs believe in God. The Catholic Church lost a third of its members in the 1990s and other churches showed even larger declines. The Czech Republic is arguably the most secularized country in the EU. By linking its lot inextricably with the Church, KDU-CSL also makes it harder to attract new members. In fact, the Christian Democrats had 44,800 members last year, 15,600 less than in 1998.

¶5. (U) Demographics are not in the party's favor either. The average age of party members is 62. At the recent party congress, the party leadership voted to amend past practices and increase the electoral terms for party leaders from two years to four, in spite of an impassioned plea from a member of the party's youth wing that such a move would keep any up and comers out of any active leadership roles for an additional four years, and make it hard for the party to field appealing, experienced young candidates in 2010.

¶6. (U) In addition, the party's positions on a number of issues seem to run counter to current trends. The party has

adopted a hard line on narcotics just as the country is leaning towards non-criminalization of the possession of small amounts of soft drugs. The party promotes family values in its published platform. But Czechs have the third lowest birth-rate in the world, behind only China with its one-child policy, and Hong Kong, where housing shortages and career ambitions have led to one-child families. KDU-CSL is the only Czech party for whom faith plays any role. KDU is strongly opposed to abortion, communism, same-sex marriage, and tolerance towards so called soft drugs; and strongly in favor of family values and entrepreneurism. For the U.S., KDU-CSL's decreasing numbers represent the potential loss of a like-minded partner.

¶7. (SBU) COMMENT: If Kalousek's gamble pays off and ODS/KDU-CSL get enough votes to form a government, then Kalousek will be in a strong position. He could push for KDU-CSL maintaining its three, or possibly even more cabinet seats, which would be good for U.S. interests. Foreign Minister Svoboda has been particularly good for US-Czech ties. Svoboda's personal crusade against the regime in Cuba has even led to threats against him and his family.

¶8. (SBU) In the most recent poll of political preferences, released November 17, KDU-CSL was supported by just 6.3%, a drop of 2.1% from the October poll. This leaves them just above the 5% threshold for entry into parliament. They should make it into parliament next year, and will almost certainly do all they can to link up with whichever party forms a government. But if Paroubek's CSSD decides it doesn't need KDU-CSL, and the Christian Democrats spend four years in the opposition, the party could have trouble getting 5% in 2010. The current demographic and opinion trends, if unchanged, will exacerbate the party's decline. Small opposition parties can easily become extraparlimentary parties and in the Czech Republic, those tend to become and remain politically insignificant.

CABANISS